

Tories forced to retreat over NHS pay and holidays...

Victory on annual leave! Now let's fight for an above inflation pay rise

NHS WORKERS have forced the Tories back from an outrageous attempt to cut annual leave in their latest pay offer. The groundswell of anger expressed, following a leak about 2018's NHS pay deal, has made Hunt and May realise that they had bitten off more than they could chew.

NHS workers battle, day in, day out, to provide care amidst cuts and privatisation.

With staff morale at an all time low, it was yet another slap in the face.

The climbdown we've witnessed, amidst a wave of fury and horror across the health service, has revealed the feeble weakness of the Tory government.

Shadow chancellor John McDonnell and shadow health secretary Jonathon Ashcroft's condemnation of the offer, the power of the UCU university workers strikes, and the response of health workers themselves, all helped tip the balance to create a storm of political pressure.

Health unions and NHS workers should now be confident that through a fightback, we can win a real pay rise. Many will be relieved to see the back of the 1 percent cap and the assault on annual leave, but the new NHS pay deal still falls short of what we deserve by a long way.

Dangerous

We're looking at around inflation for the first year, and very likely below inflation for the following two years. Within the Tories' backtrack on the cut to holidays, they've now also reduced the amount to be paid in the offer from 6.53 to 6 percent over three years.

They want to get rid of automatic increments, so NHS staff will have to jump through hoops, with performance related pay when it comes to increments. That will mean an increase in bullying management in a context of unrealistic targets.

After suffering the longest sustained pay squeeze since records began in the 1850s, NHS workers deserve a real, fully above inflation rise. And more!

After another devastating winter crisis (that hasn't yet ended!), NHS staff have been stretched to unprecedented and profoundly unsafe workload levels.



Many are forced daily to do their best to cope in circumstances of dangerous staff to patient ratios. Nurses and others are leaving in droves because their mental and physical health is threatened by a context where they simply can't provide the level of care they trained to deliver.

Our unions should be reacting in anger and action to the insult of another below inflation "rise".

The money is there

The offer is the height of hypocrisy, when you consider that the pay rise for MPs in the last three years has been 15 percent! We are clearly not "all in it together".

Austerity is a choice. The NHS cuts, and the privatisation agenda—where services are sold off to private firms who lower conditions and the quality of care—are a political choice, and so is the pay cap. It's about ensuring the rich can get richer while the rest of us are forced to pay for a crisis caused by the bosses and bankers.

And as they reel in profits at the expense of our pay, services and conditions, they seek to divide us. They scapegoat migrants and Muslims to divert the blame away from the real culprits.

Our NHS is the perfect anti-dote to this divisive racism. Built on migrant labour, the NHS is run today by migrant workers from all over the world.

It was great to see NHS workers among the thousands marching on Stand Up To Racism demonstrations on 17 March.

NHS staff should take inspiration from the momentous strike by 40,000 UCU university workers, who organised from the bottom up, with mass support from students and the public. UCU are fighting to defend their pensions, with slogans like "The money's there, where's our share?!".

With hundreds on picket lines and thousands on marches, they managed to stop their union leadership suspending action for a deal that falls short of what they are fighting for.

Their strike shows the potential our unions have to win serious victories when they lead combatative strikes mobilising their membership in a mass, active way.

In the NHS, workers need to organise across unions and pressure union leaders to coordinate action to fight for a real rise.

Time to fight

Let's organise hospital gate rallies, big staffside meetings, petitions, group selfies on wards—anything expressing our determination to fight for a better pay offer: **at least RPI (currently 3.9%) for all**

Any offer without this, as a minimum, should not be endorsed by the health unions. Every member should vote in any ballots and consultations to reject an offer that falls short of this. It's great to see that the GMB is recommending rejection. Other NHS union leaderships should follow suit and mount serious campaigns to give members confidence.

The political backdrop, with the rise in support for Corbyn's policies giving millions confidence in a real anti-austerity alternative, is very favourable for striking workers, as the UCU strike shows.

It's not so favourable for Tories and their rich privateer pals. Remember the solidarity for the junior doctors' strikes?

Imagine how much greater this could be for an NHS strike now, after Grenfell, after the Carillion Collapse, and when millions are furious at the Tories' slash and burn policy for our NHS.

We can't wait till 2020. With the Tories in deep crisis and the rich as unpopular as ever, we need to send the message to our union leaders—now's the time to fight.

We can win.

